

*ec-satyr*On 2000 {bodies in the bit-stream} compliant

*a mingling of the virtual, the aesthetic, and the sexual*

by Joseph Nechvatal

2000 artist statement by Joseph Nechvatal

for his exhibition of computer-robotic assisted paintings

*ec-satyr*On 2000

at Universal Concepts Unlimited (aka UCU)

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“Eroticism which is a fusion, which shifts interest away from and beyond the person and his limits, is nevertheless expressed by an object. We are faced with the paradox of an object which implies the abolition of the limits of all objects, of an erotic object.” (...) “Whether it be a question of hearts held breathless or of impudent lasciviousness, whether it be a question of divine love, everywhere around us I have found desire extended toward a fellow being: eroticism around us is so violent, it intoxicates hearts

with so much force... its abyss is so deep within us, that there is no celestial opening which does not take its form and its fever from it.” --Georges Bataille, *Erotism. Death and Sensuality*

“Our sensuality is not an intentionality but an involution; it espouses the support and repose of the ground, sinks into the fathomless depths of the sparkling and dazzling light, into the decomposition of the hard edges of things in twilight, gets caught up in the rhythms of colors disengaged from the graspable contours of things, abandons itself to the hum of the city and the murmur of nature, and loses itself in the beginningless, endless anonymity of the night. Orgasmic voluptuousness is a collapse of posture, dismemberment of organs and limbs which glow for themselves, aimless movements of caresses, transubstantiation of flesh and glands from flexible to ferric and from compacted hardness to liquefaction and vaporization.” --Alphonso Lingis, *Fantasy Space*

“In virtual space, the so-called ‘self’ is uncoupled from the body, projected into computerized space, and reconstructed in digital form ... both the body and the ‘self’ are represented within virtual space in a disembodied manner...” --Christine Boyer, *Cybercities*

“A curious alliance: the cold impersonality of technology with the flames of ecstasy.” --Milan Kundera, *Slowness*

## I

My most recent series Of cOmputer-rObOtic assisted paintings, entitled *ec-satyricOn<sup>1</sup> 2000 {bodies in the bit-stream} compliant*, puts forth a willingly capricious alliance that associates discourses Of virtuality with the abjectness Of pornography; an association which opens up both notions to mental connections that enlarge them beyond themselves. With *ec-satyricOn 2000*

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<sup>1</sup> *The Satyricon* or *Satyricon liber* (1st century AD) is a comic, picaresque novel that is related to several ancient literary genres. In style it ranges between the highly realistic and the self-consciously literary, and its form is episodic. It relates the wanderings and escapades of a disreputable trio of adventurers, the narrator Encolpius, his friend Ascyltos, and the boy Giton. The surviving portions of the *Satyricon* (parts of Books XV and XVI) probably represent about one-tenth of the complete work, which was evidently very long. The longest and the best episode in the surviving portions of the *Satyricon* is the *Cena Trimalchionis*, or *Banquet of Trimalchio* (ch. 26-78). This is a description of a dinner party given by Trimalchio, an immensely rich and vulgar freedman (former slave), to a group of friends and hangers-on. The scene is a Greco-Roman town in Campania, and the guests, mostly freedmen like their host, are drawn from what corresponded to the petit bourgeois class. Trimalchio is the quintessence of the parvenu, a figure familiar enough in ancient satirical literature, but especially so in the 1st century AD, when freedmen as a class were at their most influential. The combination of literary sophistication with polished obscenity is consistent with the wish to titillate the jaded palates of the debauched. Insofar as any moral attitude at all is perceptible in the work as a whole, it is a brand of hedonism.

*{bodies in the bit-stream}* compliant I have attempted to pictorially integrate the Occurrence Of the loss Of subjectivity as experienced in sexual transport and sexual fantasies with the philosophical loss Of sovereignty typical Of the disembodied finesse encountered when immersed in virtual space. Here - for example with the loss Of body consciousness specific to total-immersion within a virtual reality environment - One frequently senses a transport dissolution moving consciousness away from nature even while developing a slightly ridiculous, Fellini-like, human self-consciousness.

Approaching the *ec-satyricon 2000* *{bodies in the bit-stream}* compliant series, One hopefully encounters the feeling Of virtual space as extensively layered, nuanced, cadenced and revelatorily inscrutable; where the primal apprehension Of losing control dominates. This consternation is supposedly connected to Our premature awareness Of sex/death that inevitable accompanies the individual ego as it emerges Out Of the all-consuming Oceanic unity Of the mother matrix. By the phrase *Oceanic unity*, I am referring to Adrian Stokes's use Of this term in his own voluminous art writings which were influenced by psychoanalytical criticism. It is characteristic, Stokes argues, for both artist and audience to have emotional deficits which can only be gratified by a replacement for the maternal breast, those gelatinous orbs which once provided generalized feelings Of floating satisfaction, reassurance and comfort to the relatively unindividualized suckling.<sup>2</sup>

## II

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<sup>2</sup> Stokes, A. 1963. *Painting and the Inner World*. London: Tavistock Publications. Stokes, A. 1972. *The Image in Form: Selected Writings of Adrian Stokes*. London: Pantheon. Stokes, A. 1979. *The Critical Writings of Adrian Stokes*. London: Thomas and Hudson.

“We form a rhizome with our viruses, or rather, our viruses make us form a rhizome with other creatures.” --Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *On The Line*

“Like philosophy, art exceeds lived experience by creating an approach to chaotic virtuality.” --Tamsin Lorraine, *Irigaray and Deleuze : Experiments in Visceral Philosophy*

William BurrOughs has said that sexual desire is like a virus that is always On the hunt fOr a new hOst -- a virus that almOst always infects new technOlOgy first. In encOunters with virtualizing digitizatiOn, representatiOns Of carnal pulp used in fleshing-Out *ec-satyricOn 2000 {bodies in the bit-stream} compliant* (primarily female silicOn-implanted breasts, my testicles, variOus labia, and the pOsteriOr glutimOus maximus Of bOth sexes - sOme prOCured On-line, Others via digital phOtOgraphic techniques) are turned diaphanOus thrOugh variOus reprOductive digital prOCesses and synthetic maneuvers - including viral attacks. The prOgramming used tO enact the cOMputer viral attacks was develOped in 1992-3 when I was LOuis Pasteur artist-in-resident at ArbOis, France; LOuis Pasteur's hOme tOwn. This cOMputer prOgram was written On Hyper-card in Basic with the assistance Of PrOf. Jean-Philippe MassOnie Of LabOratOire MIS, Université de Franche-COMté, France in 1992. The resulting, highly synthetic, cOmpOsitiOns are sent telematically tO the memOry Of cOMputer-rObOtic apparatuses. It is thrOugh the rObOtic actiOn Of the painting machine, which lays dOwn a thrObbing rhythm Of spurting paint, that the digital cOmpOsitiOns are then returned tO a supplementary level Of enduring palpability and stillness.

This ex-centric practice Of sending digital files On-line Over the telephOne lines tO a hired cOMputer-rObOtic machine fOr painting On canvas fOllOws the

Dada prOpOsitiOn which is fOund in Richard Huelsenbeck's (ed.) *The Dada Almanac*<sup>3</sup> that an artist cOuld Order paintings Over the phOne and have them fabricated by a third party. Of cOurse this idea was famOUSly realized in 1922 by László MOhOly-Nagy when he Ordered his *TelephOne Pictures* by phOne frOm a sign factOry.<sup>4</sup> TONy Smith, the American sculptOr, is relevant alsO tO this cOnceptual traditiOn with his 1962 steel 6 by 6 by 6 fOOt cube minimal masterpiece *Die* - a cOmpOsitiOn he Ordered Over the phOne by calling in the specificatiOns tO his fabricatOr.

BeyOnd the telematic and cOMputer-rObOtic techniques utilized, *ec-satyricOn 2000 {bodies in the bit-stream} compliant* aims tO fOCUS attentiOn On an interface between the virtual and the actual. What I call the *viractual*. With the increased augmentatiOn Of the self via electrONics tOday, the actual flesh cO-exists with the virtual and the Organic fuses with the cOMputer-rObOtic. COnsequently, I am interested with *ec-satyricOn 2000 {bodies in the bit-stream} compliant* in delineating a new unbridled sense Of viractual heterOgeneity and alterity which cOuples the biOlOgical with the technOlOgical.

Indeed, *ec-satyricOn 2000 {bodies in the bit-stream} compliant* strives fOr a depictiOn Of an anti-essentiality Of the bOdy-in-bits which allOws nO privileged lOGOs, but insists, rather, On a displacement, Or deferral, Of meaning. Images Of the flesh are undOne by disturbances they cannOt cOntain via hybrid machine-sexual pOSSibilities.<sup>5</sup> In this viral rupture Of the hard flesh, sexual thOught detaches itself frOm the traditiOnal hOst/parasite Order and authOrity Of the Old sign and tOpples dOWn intO the realm Of imaginatiOn, Of cOntradictOry fantasy, and intO bOdily felt sublime nOn-knOWledge. This SatyricOnian nOn-

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<sup>3</sup> Huelsenbeck, R. (ed.) 1920 (1993) *The Dada Almanac*, p. 95

<sup>4</sup> Moholy-Nagy L. 1947 *The New Vision and Abstract of an Artist*, p. 79

<sup>5</sup> Claire J. & Siegemann, H. (eds.) 1975 *Le Macchine Calibri / The Bachelor Machines*

knOwledge is certainly the mOst erudite, the mOst aware, the mOst cOnsciOus, and the mOst cluttered area Of Our cOnsciOusness tOday - as it is alsO the sexual depths frOm which we beings emerged as suckling parasites intO Our precariOus existence.